

# The "Parque de Doñana", and its Contribution to Environmental Activities for Environmental Protection

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The area of the river Guadalquivir's marshes is located at the river mouth, between the Atlantic Ocean and the river's right bank. This area, which is famous all over the world for its zoological values, is presently protected by the maximum legal regulations.

Since 1969 the National Park of Doñana has been located right in the heart of this area. It is managed by the central administration of the Spanish State, and has an area of 50,720 hectares, 25,000 of which are flooded in the wet season. Nowadays, in 1989 and in one of the most sensitive areas surrounding it, a Natural Park on the outskirts of Doñana has been created. This Park has an area of 60,000 hectares and is managed by the administration of the Andalusian Autonomous Government.

This zoological paradise consists of huge estates with very little human population - which was devoted to hunting and fishing activities. The area was once a famous hunting site for the kings and personalities of the old days.

However, the environment of the area was not threatened until a reasonably short time ago, when the first attempts for economic and social development of the area began some time before 1925.

Around 1925, the purchasing and speculation of land on the banks of the river Guadalquivir began with the drainage of the land and the establishment of irrigation systems in order to produce cotton and rice.

In 1930 the first big efforts to drain the marshes were carried out, with the intention of settling colonists.

In 1939, a road from Huelva to Cádiz was planned along the coastline.

In the 1950's, the State's National Stock of Trees attempted big reforestation with eucalyptus, while at the same time, another official organization, the National Institute for colonization tried to produce rubber with plantations of guaba trees. At the same time, the Army also threatened this area, by trying to build up a training field in it. All these conflicts actually were of great help to preserve the natural environment of the region, because thanks to the growing interests of the politicians and administrative agencies, the owner's aggressive attempts, to develop were thwarted.

In 1959 the first actions taken by a non - governmental organisation (\*) were carried out, when the scientist J.A. Valverde requested the International Wildfowl Research Bureau, chaired by Mr. Hoffman to buy land in order to protect it from a new drainage and agricultural proposal for the area.

Nevertheless, this attempt didn't succeed until 1963, when after the creation of the World Wildlife Fund, 6,700 hectares were bought into the Reserve of Doñana, with 21 millions pesetas from the W.W.F. and another 12 millions pesetas contributed by the Spanish Administration.

In the year 1965, the urbanisation of Matalascañas on the beaches of the Atlantic Ocean began, with the help of State Tourism promotion.

With the idea of facing this growing number of threats, and especially to prevent the transformation of land for agriculture and tourist urbanisation, the National Park of Doñana was created in 1969 over an area of 35,000 hectares.

(\*) O.N.G. in the original document (Note from the translator).

In this same year, the W.W.F. acquired 3,214 hectares on behalf of ADENA - its Spanish branch -, and in 1971, 50 more hectares were purchased.

However, the Park was still threatened, for in 1971 the State declared a matter of National Interest the transformation of 45,950 hectares neighbouring the Park into an irrigation area. A year later, this acreage was reduced to 28,500 hectares, and later on, when the works were completed, it was finally reduced to 10,000 hectares, for it has been proved that the dessication of the subterranean water contributed to the drainage of the flooded areas of the Park.

Likewise, another kind of non - governmental organization the José María Blanc Foundation, which owns important extensions of land within the premises of the Natural Park, is destined to play an important conservationist role through careful management of their land. In order to achieve a successful use and conservation of its natural resources, the Foundation has created shelter areas for threatened species, and achieved a suitable and compatible balance between the fauna and flora and the agricultural use of the land.

The José María Blanc Foundation, in cooperation with the General Direction for the Environment of the European Community, and with its financial support, is carrying out a project for the protection and conditioning of a shelter in the marshes of the river Guadalquivir, especially aimed to protect and preserve three species which are about to become extinct: the Brown Teal (*Mareca angustirostris*), *Porphyrio porphyrio*, and the Horned Coot (*Fulica cristata*), in a damp area of over 200 hectares.

This represents an example that ought to be followed by other non - profit and non - governmental organisations, with the direct support of the corresponding State and Regional authorities, because the conservation of a natural inheritance of such a magnitude is something which demands on the efforts of everyone. Efforts of governmental organisations alone are often not enough because in many cases the government doesn't have the flexibility nor the latitude to operate, and in other cases such organisations have political interests rather than true conservationist interests at heart.